

There is no way that any American can view the Vietnam Wall without their heart becoming heavy with both pride and sadness. Although this war caused so many different views from so many different people, the one thing that we all can and should agree upon is the honor of the service of those who served in Vietnam.

They served with the same commitment to honor, duty, and country as every American has in wars past. They served during a particularly difficult time in our history. But despite the times, they never wavered from their devotion to duty. Their actions speak volumes about their character when you consider that the average age of the American service person in Vietnam was 19.

Anyone who has read the letters from home between service members and their families know the tremendous toll that the war took on both. We must never forget their sacrifice.

Mr. Speaker, there are still open wounds of the heart that have not healed yet. That is because there is the unresolved cases of our missing MIAs and POWs. Our families can not be at peace until we know the whereabouts of their loved ones' remains. Our government must take every action necessary to resolve these cases as soon as possible.

In sum, Mr. Speaker, today I offer praise and respect to all the Americans, both military and civilian that served in Vietnam. Their sacrifice will never be forgotten.

Mr. KUYKENDALL. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. NETHERCUTT). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. KUYKENDALL) that the House suspend the rules and agree to the concurrent resolution, H. Con. Res. 228.

The question was taken.

Mr. THOMPSON of California. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX and the Chair's prior announcement, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

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FREEDOM TO E-FILE ACT

Mr. GOODLATTE. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the Senate bill (S. 777) to require the Department of Agriculture to establish an electronic filing and retrieval system to enable the public to file all required paperwork electronically with the Department and to have access to public information on farm programs, quarterly trade, economic, and production reports, and other similar information, as amended.

The Clerk read as follows:

S. 777

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Freedom to E-File Act".

SEC. 2. ELECTRONIC FILING AND RETRIEVAL.

(a) ESTABLISHMENT OF INTERNET-BASED SYSTEM.—The Secretary of Agriculture shall establish an electronic filing and retrieval

system that uses the telecommunications medium known as the Internet to enable farmers and other persons—

(1) to file electronically all paperwork required by the agencies of the Department of Agriculture specified in subsection (b); and

(2) to have access electronically to information, readily available to the public in published form, regarding farm programs, quarterly trade, economic, and production reports, price and supply information, and other similar information related to production agriculture.

(b) COVERED AGENCIES.—Subsection (a) shall apply to the following agencies of the Department of Agriculture:

(1) The Farm Service Agency.

(2) The Risk Management Agency.

(3) The Natural Resources Conservation Service.

(4) The rural development components of the Department included in the Secretary's service center initiative regarding State and field office collocation implemented pursuant to section 215 of the Department of Agriculture Reorganization Act of 1994 (7 U.S.C. 6915).

(c) TIME-TABLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION.—Not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall—

(1) to the maximum extent practicable, complete the establishment of the electronic filing and retrieval system required by subsection (a) to the extent necessary to permit the electronic information access required by paragraph (2) of such subsection;

(2) initiate implementation of the electronic filing required by paragraph (1) of such subsection by allowing farmers and other persons to download forms from the Internet and submit completed forms via facsimile, mail, or related means; and

(3) modify forms used by the agencies specified in subsection (b) into a more user-friendly format, with self-help guidance materials.

(d) INTEROPERABILITY.—In carrying out this section, the Secretary shall ensure that the agencies specified in subsection (b)—

(1) use computer hardware and software that is compatible among the agencies and will operate in a common computing environment; and

(2) develop common Internet user-interface locations and applications to consolidate the agencies' news, information, and program materials.

(e) COMPLETION OF IMPLEMENTATION.—Not later than two years after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall complete the establishment of the electronic filing and retrieval system required by subsection (a) to permit the electronic filing required by paragraph (1) of such subsection.

(f) PROGRESS REPORT.—Not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall submit to Congress a report describing the progress made toward establishing the electronic filing and retrieval system required by subsection (a).

SEC. 3. AVAILABILITY OF AGENCY INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY FUNDS.

(a) RESERVATION OF FUNDS.—From funds made available for each agency of the Department of Agriculture specified in section 2(b) for information technology or information resource management, the Secretary of Agriculture shall reserve an amount equal to not more than the following:

(1) For fiscal year 2001, \$3,000,000.

(2) For each subsequent fiscal year, \$2,000,000.

(b) TIME FOR RESERVATION.—The Secretary shall notify Congress of the amount to be reserved under subsection (a) for a fiscal year not later than December 1 of that fiscal year.

(c) USE OF FUNDS.—Funds reserved under subsection (a) shall be used to establish the

electronic filing and retrieval system required by section 2(a). Once the system is established and operational, reserved amounts shall be used for maintenance and improvement of the system.

(d) RETURN OF FUNDS.—Funds reserved under subsection (a) and unobligated at the end of the fiscal year shall be returned to the agency from which the funds were reserved, and such funds shall remain available until expended.

SEC. 4. CONFIDENTIALITY.

In carrying out this Act, the Secretary of Agriculture—

(1) may not make available any information over the Internet that would otherwise not be available for release under section 552 or 552a of title 5, United States Code; and

(2) shall ensure, to the maximum extent practicable, that the confidentiality of persons is maintained.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. GOODLATTE) and the gentleman from Texas (Mr. STENHOLM) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. GOODLATTE).

Mr. GOODLATTE. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, the Freedom to E-File Act, introduced by the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. LAHOOD), requires the United States Department of Agriculture to establish an electronic filing and retrieval system to enable the public to file with the Department all required paperwork electronically. In doing so, the act would allow producers, farmers, and rural America to have access to information on farm programs, quarterly trade, economic and production reports and other similar information. The bill of the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. LAHOOD) allows farmers to do business with the Department of Agriculture over the Internet.

The rapidly evolving e-commerce economy of the 21st century continues to assert itself as the future of worldwide commerce. Like any business today, farmers are using computers and the Internet for a variety of purposes, including financial management systems and market information. It is becoming increasingly important to ensure that all segments of our economy are technologically efficient.

Currently, the United States Department of Agriculture operates in a progressively antiquated computer environment. The continued use of such a system threatens to disable producers and farmers from access to a maturing information technology market. Rural Americans face the very real potential of being left behind in this era of sweeping technological advances. It is vital to empower producers and farmers by providing them with the technological tools to do business via the Internet with the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The continued absence of a viable common computing environment at the Department will result in the failure to assist the very constituency it is obliged to serve. The Freedom to E-

File Act achieves the most important objective of allowing the public the access and freedom to do effective, better business with the U.S. Department of Agriculture via the Internet.

The globally integrated e-commerce economy demands that private and public entities move quickly to establish efficient avenues of commerce. This legislation forces the USDA in the right direction, the direction of enabling producers, farmers, and rural Americans to benefit in an age of technological revolution.

Mr. Speaker, as chairman of the Congressional Internet Caucus, I want to commend the gentleman from Illinois for his leadership on this issue. This legislation is badly needed. Changes at the Department of Agriculture to get up to speed, even with other government agencies, much less with what is happening in the private sector, is long overdue. I also thank the gentleman from Texas for his support of this bipartisan legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. STENHOLM. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of S. 777 as amended by H.R. 852, the Freedom to E-File Act. H.R. 852 was sponsored by the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. LAHOOD), and I, too, commend him for his leadership in this area. It was approved by the House Committee on Agriculture on March 29. It would require the Secretary of Agriculture to establish an Internet-based system to allow farmers and ranchers and other persons to complete and submit program applications electronically and to have electronic access to all relevant economic and administrative program information and data.

The legislation before us today also contains a provision that will ensure that the Secretary of Agriculture maintains the confidentiality of persons, and ensures that that information is released only in accordance with current law.

Mr. Speaker, I have long been a proponent of initiatives at USDA to provide better service to farmers and ranchers through streamlining and the use of new technologies, while at the same time saving taxpayer dollars.

To date, USDA's progress in the information technology arena has been disappointing. For example, a February 2000 General Accounting Office report states that USDA's progress in implementing its initiatives, reorganization, and modernization efforts has been mixed. The report then identifies two primary reasons for its lack of success, the lack of a comprehensive plan to guide the modernization effort and the lack of a management structure with the accountability and authority to resolve differences among the agencies. These findings give me little confidence and further validate my concerns that USDA cannot overcome its stovepipe culture without the intervention of Congress. USDA recognizes this,

and, at certain levels, supports this bill.

Growing numbers of farmers and ranchers are using home computers. This fact, coupled with budget demands, is putting enormous pressure on USDA's field service employees. It is, therefore, imperative that USDA take advantage of the Internet for the efficiencies it can offer. Doing so will benefit overworked field service staff, save taxpayer dollars, and allow farmers and ranchers to spend more time on their operations and less time visiting USDA offices.

For these reasons, I believe USDA must improve electronic access to its programs and services. Consequently, I support the goals of S. 777, as amended, otherwise known as the Freedom to E-File Act. While I would prefer a more comprehensive look at USDA reorganization and modernization needs, it unfortunately appears that changes at USDA are only going to be made on an incremental basis.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support this bill.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. GOODLATTE. Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. LAHOOD), the author of the legislation.

(Mr. LAHOOD asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. LAHOOD. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank very much the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. GOODLATTE) for his leadership as the chairman of the subcommittee that held hearings on the bill; and the ranking member of that subcommittee, the gentlewoman from North Carolina (Mrs. CLAYTON), also for her leadership and support; and certainly the gentleman from Texas (Mr. STENHOLM), the ranking member of the full committee, for his encouragement over the last year to move ahead with this important legislation.

To put it simply, this legislation will bring the Department of Agriculture into the 21st century by allowing farmers, producers, and people in rural America to do their business with the USDA over the Internet. Like any business, farmers are using computers for a variety of purposes, including financial management, accessing market information, and utilizing precision agriculture management systems.

As I have traveled around the 14 counties that I represent in central Illinois, much of which is agriculture, and visited farm families and visited farm homes, every farmer has a computer today. Every farmer in America has access to the world. One of the first things that farmers do in the early morning hours is they get on their computer and they check the weather. Then in my area they check the price of corn and beans and livestock. Then they look and see how their stocks are doing, if they have the good fortune of having that kind of capability to own stocks.

But then what we are offering them under this legislation is the fact that they do not have to hop in their truck and go down to the FS office to file their forms or to find out what the USDA has to offer them. All of this information will be available to them. After they check the price of corn and beans and after they check the weather, they can find out what else is going on at USDA, a marvelous opportunity. I believe, if given the opportunity, many farmers would choose to file necessary farm program paperwork from their home or office computer.

The interesting thing is that, this year alone, 34 million taxpayers have already filed or will file their income taxes before April 15th over the Internet, electronically. The Internal Revenue Service has moved taxpayers into the 21st century; and we should be doing that for our farmers and ranchers, and particularly for those who represent large masses of agriculture area, Wyoming, the Dakotas, areas where farmers and ranchers have to travel long distances. This will avail them of wonderful opportunities to save time and energy by having access to this information and filing their forms electronically.

Mr. Speaker, I say that the Freedom to E-File Act is a reasonable, sensible way to help farmers spend less time filling out paperwork and more time doing what they know how to do best, which is farming and ranching. This legislation will not only increase the efficiency of farmers and ranchers, it will also increase the efficiency of the USDA, as has been mentioned, by reducing the amount of paperwork that needs to be filled out in local county offices.

USDA has already started down the road to providing some of the benefits of the Internet to the American farmer. Freedom to E-File will provide the Department with the necessary flexibility and resources to allow USDA to bring agriculture into the Internet age.

Again, I want to thank the gentleman from Texas (Chairman COMBEST), the gentleman from Texas (Mr. STENHOLM), the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. GOODLATTE), and the gentlewoman from North Carolina (Mrs. CLAYTON) and all the staff people on both sides for your help in crafting this legislation, and also to USDA. We have kind of brought them along kicking and screaming in this process, but we think they are with us now; and we hope that they will be able to implement this legislation after it is signed by the President.

Finally, Senator PETER FITZGERALD from the other body was most helpful in having this legislation pass there; and I want to acknowledge his work and encourage all Members to support this very, very important legislation.

Mr. STENHOLM. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I would just say in conclusion, I encourage our colleagues to support this bill. We have heard from

the gentleman from Illinois all of the reasons why this is needed. The disappointment is that we have not been able to move it faster within USDA, but it is certainly my hope that all of those who may be in the category of "foot-draggers" within the various agencies and various employees of USDA might take this legislation and the support of many at USDA and recognize that we will have some additional opportunities this year to do more in this area of information technology, and, in doing more, we will be able to serve our farmers more efficiently.

Mr. Speaker, I thank all of those who have been involved in this legislation; and I urge the support of it.

Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. GOODLATTE. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I would join in urging my colleagues to support this legislation. It is very true that farmers in many respects are some of our best users of computer technology and the Internet, and it is time that the Department that is designed to support their efforts moves into the 21st century, as the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. LAHOOD) indicated.

□ 1530

So I strongly support this bill. I thank the gentleman for his efforts in this matter.

Mr. GOODLATTE. Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. NETHERCUTT). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. GOODLATTE) that the House suspend the rules and pass the Senate bill, S. 777, as amended.

The question was taken.

Mr. LAHOOD. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX and the Chair's prior announcement, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

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GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. GOODLATTE. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks on S. 777, the Senate bill just considered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Illinois?

There was no objection.

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RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12 of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess until approximately 5 p.m.

Accordingly (at 3 o'clock and 30 minutes p.m.), the House stood in recess until approximately 5 p.m.

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□ 1703

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. PEASE) at 5 o'clock and 3 minutes p.m.

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MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

A message from the Senate by Mr. Lundregan, one of its clerks, announced that the Senate has passed with an amendment in which the concurrence of the House is requested, a concurrent resolution of the House of the following title:

H. Con. Res. 290. Concurrent Resolution establishing the congressional budget for the United States Government for fiscal year 2001, revising the congressional budget for the United States Government for fiscal year 2000, and setting forth appropriate budgetary levels for each of fiscal years 2002 through 2005.

The message also announced that the Senate insists upon its amendment to the resolution (H. Con. Res. 290) "Concurrent resolution establishing the congressional budget for the United States Government for fiscal year 2001, revising the congressional budget for the United States Government for fiscal year 2000, and setting forth appropriate budgetary levels for each of fiscal years 2002 through 2005," requests a conference with the House on the disagreeing votes of the two Houses thereon, and appoints Mr. DOMENICI, Mr. GRASSLEY, Mr. BOND, Mr. GORTON, Mr. LAUTENBERG, Mr. CONRAD, and Mr. WYDEN, to be the conferees on the part of the Senate.

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ANNOUNCEMENT OF INTENTION TO OFFER MOTION TO INSTRUCT CONFEREES ON H.R. 1501, JUVENILE JUSTICE REFORM ACT OF 1999

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, I want to announce my intention to offer a motion to instruct conferees on H.R. 1501 tomorrow.

Pursuant to clause 7(c) of rule XXII, I hereby announce my intention to offer a motion to instruct conferees on H.R. 1501. The form of the motion is as follows:

Mr. Conyers moves to instruct conferees on the part of the House that the conferees on the part of the House on the disagreeing votes of the two Houses on the bill, H.R. 1501, be instructed to insist that the committee on conference meet and report a committee substitute that includes both:

One, measures that aid in the effective enforcement of gun safety laws within the scope of conference and, two, common sense gun safety measures that prevent felons, fugitives, and stalkers from obtaining firearms and

children from getting access to guns within the scope of the conference. Congresswoman SHEILA JACKSON-LEE of Texas, Congresswoman JULIA CARSON, Congresswoman JUANITA MILLENDER-MCDONALD, and Congresswoman CAROLYN MCCARTHY are cosponsors of this motion.

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APPOINTMENT OF CONFEREES ON H. CON. RES. 290, CONCURRENT RESOLUTION ON THE BUDGET, FISCAL YEAR 2001

Mr. KASICH. Mr. Speaker, pursuant to clause 1 of rule XXII, and by the direction of the Committee on the Budget, I move to take from the Speaker's table the concurrent resolution (H. Con. Res. 290) establishing the congressional budget for the United States Government for fiscal year 2001, revising the congressional budget for the United States Government for fiscal year 2000, and setting forth the appropriate budgetary levels for each of fiscal years 2002 through 2005, with a Senate amendment thereto, disagree to the Senate amendment and agree to the conference asked by the Senate.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. PEASE). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. KASICH).

The motion was agreed to.

MOTION TO INSTRUCT OFFERED BY MR. SPRATT

Mr. SPRATT. Mr. Speaker, I offer a motion to instruct the conferees on the budget resolution.

The Clerk read as follows:

Mr. SPRATT moves that the managers on the part of the House at the conference on the disagreeing votes of the two Houses on the Senate amendment to the concurrent resolution H. Con. Res. 290 be instructed, within the scope of the conference,

(1) to insist that the tax cuts set forth in the reconciliation directives in the concurrent resolution be reported on September 22, 2000, the latest possible date within the scope of the conference, and to require that the reconciliation legislation implementing those tax cuts not be reported any earlier, thereby allowing Congress sufficient time to first enact legislation to reform and strengthen Medicare by establishing a universal Medicare prescription drug benefit, consistent with section 202 of the Senate amendment and provisions in section 10 of the House concurrent resolution, recognizing that more than half of Medicare beneficiaries without drug coverage have income above 150 percent of poverty as officially defined; and

(2) to recede to the lower and less fiscally irresponsible tax cuts in the Senate amendment, which do not include a reserve fund for additional tax reduction contingent on improved projects of future revenues, in preference to tax cuts of \$200 billion or more as embodied in the House-passed Resolution, which Chairman Kasich identified during Budget Committee markup and House debate on the budget resolution as a paydown' on the tax cuts proposed by Governor George W. Bush, in order to conserve the budgetary resources needed for the universal Medicare prescription drug benefit and for debt reduction.

Mr. KASICH (during the reading). Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent